SACS COC Expectations for Quality Enhancement Plans

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Why Accreditation by SACS COC[1]?

- The Department of Education (federal) requires that institutions that receive federal funding (financial aid and other) be accredited by an approved accrediting agency – SACS COC is the regional accrediting agency approved by the DOE

- Translation: you lose all federal funding for financial aid (and other sources) if you are not accredited; if you engage in practices that are not acceptable you may be asked to RETURN funding

- SACS COC Accreditation is thus MUCH more important than discipline-based accreditations for an institution

1 Southern Association of Colleges and Schools, Commission on Colleges

What Does "Reaffirmation of Accreditation" by SACS COC Involve?

Two Components:

- Compliance Certification:
  - 16 "Core Requirements
  - 66 "Comprehensive Standards"
  - 7 "Federal Requirements"
- Quality Enhancement Plan – designed to ensure that the institution engages in activities that will results in improvements to student learning and related to institutional planning and mission.

SACS COC *Principles of Accreditation* :
Core Requirement and Comprehensive Standard

- **Core Requirement 2.12:**

  The institution has developed an acceptable Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP) that **includes an institutional process for identifying key issues emerging from institutional assessment** and **focuses on learning outcomes and/or the environment supporting student learning and accomplishing the mission of the institution**.

- **Comprehensive Standard 3.3.2:**

  The institution has developed a Quality Enhancement Plan that **(1) demonstrates institutional capability** for the initiation, implementation, and completion of the QEP; **(2) includes broad-based involvement of institutional constituencies** in the development and proposed implementation of the QEP; and **(3) identifies goals and a plan to assess their achievement**.

Components of an Acceptable QEP

For the **Core Requirement**:

- Includes a process identifying key issues emerging from institutional assessment
- Focuses on learning outcomes and/or the environment supporting student learning and accomplishing the mission of the institution

Together, these two components clearly focus the QEP topic on STUDENT LEARNING, so:

- Focuses on the need to tie the topic to information that you have about the institution – particularly student learning "needs" that come from that information.
- Focuses on ensuring that the primary focus is in improving student learning!

What is meant by "student learning"

- Knowledge – facts, concepts, theories that students have acquired and (often) can apply

- Cognitive Skills – problem solving, critical thinking, creativity/creative thinking, etc.

- Behaviors – skills, abilities that students can be observed doing or having done

- Attitudes, Values, Beliefs – internal systems that are essential for students to acquire as a result of their educational and co-curricular experiences

What is meant by "the environment supporting student learning"

- Curriculum
- Instruction
- Technology and other Learning Support Systems
- Faculty Instructional Skills
- Etc.: That is, those things that, if improved, will result in improvement of student learning!

NOTES:

1. if you focus on these, you STILL must show how student learning is improved by improving these "environments"!
2. Most QEPs include these as strategies/processes that are to be improved for the improvement of specific student learning outcomes.

EXAMPLE: UTSA's QEP: *Quantitative Scholarship: From Literacy to Mastery*

UTSA's QEP as an Example

- Student Learning Outcomes:
  - Quantitative "literacy" skills (i.e., not just "more math")
  - Writing (as a component necessary for literacy)
- Focus:
  - Core Curriculum Courses and Selected Upper-Division Courses
- "Environment" to be improved:
  - Faculty teaching skills
  - Course content
  - TA teaching/assistance skills
  - Increased number of courses with quantitative components

Components of an Acceptable QEP

For the **Comprehensive Standard**:

1. Demonstrates **institutional capability** for the initiation, implementation, and completion of the QEP
2. Includes **broad-based involvement of institutional constituencies in the development and proposed implementation** of the QEP
3. Identifies **goals and a plan to assess** their achievement.

Institutional Capability

- Personnel
  - Who was involved in developing the QEP?
  - Who will be involved in implementation?
    - Are individuals identified or is a job description available?
- Organizational Commitment
  - Support from Executives
  - Support from Community (including students as appropriate)
- Organizational Structure
  - Who reports to whom?
  - Who is accountable for what?
- Funding and Facilities (as appropriate)
  - Detailed budget needed
  - Sufficient resources to carry out plan
  - No dependence on "soft money"!

Broad-Based Involvement

- In the Development of the QEP:
  - Was the plan generated so that all affected community members could contribute ideas?
  - Was the plan designed by a group that appropriately represented the community?
  - Was proposal "vetted" to allow for input from constituencies?
- In the Implementation of the QEP:
  - Is there appropriate involvement of all constituencies?
    - In carrying-out the plan
    - In administration of the plan
    - In evaluating the plan

Goals

Three Types of Goals:

- Overall Goals for the QEP
  - Very general statements of expected impact of QEP
    - For example: "The QEP will develop critical thinking skills in students."
- Student Learning Goals/Outcomes
  - Expected outcomes – what students should know, be able to do, value, etc. as a result of the plan's actions
    - For example: "Students will be able to solve problems associated with discipline-related issues through course-based exercises."
- "Implementation Goals"
  - What will be accomplished and when?
    - For example: "5 faculty workshops, with 10 faculty members each, will be held during each summer during the tenure of the QEP."
  - What specific things will the strategies provide?
    - For example: "The faculty development workshop will enable faculty members to include exercises, lectures, and other course materials that promote critical thinking in their disciplines."

Assessment

- Overall Goals: through assessment of other "layers"

- Student Learning: through various means, including course-embedded assessments, standardized instruments, faculty-developed instruments, etc.

- Implementation: through tracking of events; also, through follow-ups to see if intended outcomes achieved.

What Do Evaluators Look For?

- **Has the topic been developed after considering the needs of the university and its students?**
  - Is it connected to the institution's planning process?
  - Is there existing "data" showing a need?
  - Has there been appropriate involvement of the university community in both identitying the topic and in developing the QEP?
- **Does the topic focus on the improvement of student learning?**
  - Has student learning been defined appropriately?
  - Are there specific outcomes for student learning?
- **Is there a detailed assessment plan? This must have TWO components:**
  - Assessment of outcomes (including student learning outcomes)
  - Assessment of "process" – i.e., an assessment of the progress toward accomplishment/implementation of the plan
- **Has the institution clearly demonstrated "capability" to carry out the plan?**
  - Have sufficient resources been committed to carrying out the plan over 5 years?
  - Have the necessary personnel been identified?
  - Has a detailed budget been developed and approved?
- SEE HANDOUT!

Successful Implementation of the QEP Requires:

- Clear understanding of the purpose, goals, outcomes
- A unified institutional effort behind the plan that includes strong support of the administration
- A leadership structure that is charged with carrying out the QEP
- An accountability system in place so that QEP leadership will be able to carry out its charge and so that the leadership is held accountable for carrying out its charge
- An effective assessment process in place to monitor student learning and key implementation goals/outcomes

Examples (from COC website)

- *Writing Realized: Developing Writing Literacies in a Technological Age (Albany State U.)*

- *Critical Thinking through Writing (Georgia State U.)*

- *R.E.A.S.O.N: Creating Coherent Pathways to Develop Critical Thinking Skills in Students (Norfolk State U.)*

- *Lobo Stars: Enhancing Academic Learning through Student Engagement (Sul Ross State U.)*

- *Learning through Discovery (U. Houston)*

- *GEMS—Gateways to Excellence in Math and Science (UT Dallas)*

- *Developing a Culture of Writing to Enhance Students' Academic and Professional Success* (Virginia State U.)

Go to: http://www.sacscoc.org/inst_forms_and_info1.asp going back to "class of 2004"

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